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AMERICAN ART NEWS.

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THE QUESTION OF "EXPERTS."

The recent granting of an attachment for the sum of \$11,800 against any property here of Prof. Elie Volpi of Florence, Italy, and who is now in that city, in a suit brought on an assigned claim of Mr. Jackson Johnson, said to be a St. Louis art collector, is a matter of much interest to the art trade and to collectors.

The holder of Mr. Johnson's claim asserts the latter was deceived as to the authenticity of two pictures attributed respectively to Rubens and Van Dyck, for which he paid \$8,000 through his agents, Warwick House, a recently formed N. Y. art firm, at the sale of the Professor's art treasures at the American Art Galleries last November.

The incident brings again to the fore, the question of what constitutes an art "expert," a subject which we have editorially discussed several times during the past few years.

It appears that a partner in Warwick House, who calls himself, or is called an art "expert," and who had every opportunity during the ten days in which the Volpi collections were on exhibition in the American Art Galleries, preceding their sale, for study and examination in the interest of the clients of his house, now asserts as an art "expert," that the pictures are not genuine, and "hence these tears."

We could wish that under the prevalent misapprehension as to the real meaning of the term "expert" in this country, that the better word "authority" could be substituted for it. With all due deference to the American Art Association, which naturally feels aggrieved at this attack upon Prof. Volpi's pictures, as, although they were and are not responsible as auctioneers, they do not welcome the doubting of works sold and accepted by them as authentic, in good faith

from reputable persons, we could wish they would themselves make less frequent use of the term.

In short, an "expert" has come to be considered by Americans as an infallible authority, like the Pope to Catholics on all church matters—in other words, a person who, if he tells one what one has always thought to be a chair, is really a sofa, must be absolutely believed, no matter how such belief may swear against one's convictions and personal knowledge. There are persons, who, from long study of, and intimate association with certain art schools or masters, must necessarily know more of the characteristics of such schools and masters than anyone else. Such persons, for example, are Drs. Bode and Bredius, who are authorities on Rembrandt and the early Dutch masters (but who often differ) or Senor Beruete on Velasquez, etc., and the early Spanish masters. But even these men are not infallible.

It is generally thought that it is a late day for the representative of Warwick House to give so-called "expert" opinion as to the validity of the pictures purchased by his house from Prof. Volpi through the American Art Association. If the claim against Prof. Volpi is substantiated in the courts (We understand that the holder of Mr. Johnson's assigned claim, is to employ the same "experts" who have testified in London for Mr. Henry F. Huntington in his suit against Lewis and Simmons, anent the picture of Mmes. Siddons and her sister, sold to him by that firm, in good faith, as by Romney) we will probably see in the future, "experts" of more or less reputation, bobbing up after important art sales to question the validity of works sold in such sales, whether or not, after previous examination. Great are the uses of advertising, especially in America.

Incidentally, it seems a pity that the unfortunate incident connected with Prof. Volpi's first arrival in this country, and which we so deplored editorially, after his most successful sale last Autumn, in our leader, "The Vindication of Volpi," should again be exploited in the dailies. Is it possible that some one, through motives of spite, "has it in" for Prof. Volpi?

OBITUARY.
Walter Clark.

Walter Clark, veteran American landscape painter, an Academician and a pupil of George Inness, died Monday at his home in Bronxville, N. Y. He was born in Brooklyn, March 9, 1848. Following his graduation from the Boston Institute of Technology he travelled in India, China and Japan. He began his art studies in the Academy of Design schools, in 1876, and in 1881 became a pupil of Inness. In 1909 he received the Inness gold medal given by the Academy.

Mr. Clark was a member of the Society of Landscape Painters of N. Y., the old Society of American Artists, the N. Y. Watercolor Club, Artists' Fund Society and the Century Association. He is survived by his wife, four sons and a daughter.

NOTES OF THE ART WORLD.

Prince Troubetzkoy is showing some forty of his bronzes at the Memorial Museum in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, in which city a reception to the sculptor and Princess Troubetzkoy was recently given at the Memorial Museum.

Two mural paintings, reminiscent of the early days of Colorado, have been completed by Allen True, of Denver, Colo., and will form part of the exterior decoration of the new American Theatre in the Western city.

CORRESPONDENCE

As to Houdon's "La Frileuse."

Editor, AMERICAN ART NEWS,

Dear Sir: Apropos of "La Frileuse" and its recent purchase, the article appearing in your journal Mar. 3 states that "Lady Charles Dilke, in her book on Houdon, describes the work, etc. There is no such book to my knowledge. In "French Architects and Sculptors of the XVII Century," by Lady Dilke, she devotes a portion of one chapter, i. e., Chapter X, to Houdon, the balance treating of Clodion and his Art.

After stating there that she had searched for "La Frileuse" at Berlin in vain, she adds "There is, however, a bronze repetition recently at Bagatelle, in the possession of Sir John Murray Scott."

Therefore what is said in your article as to the statue "again coming to light" has no particular significance. The bronze figure would appear to have been exhibited at the Salon in 1791. The entry at the Salon of 1783 is (translated) "A young girl in marble, life-size, typifying cold, renamed 'Frileuse.' It is with the author at the Library of the King."

The price reported as obtained for the figure is amazing. When we consider that the famous "Diana" was sold in N. Y. City as late as 1910 for \$57,000, one wonders what figure it would fetch if offered at this time.

Yours very truly,

Edward Biddle.

Rittenhouse Club, Phila.,

Mar. 12, 1917.

[We regret that we could not interview Mr. Jacques Seligmann on the subject of Mr. Biddle's letter, but he has sailed for Paris. Mr. Biddle is correct in his statement that the marble figure of "La Frileuse" was exhibited in the Salon of 1783. The bronze statue reproduced in our issue of Mar. 3 was the bronze, and we reproduce the marble figure on page 3. Mr. Biddle will see they are not the same. The bronze figure, as Mr. Biddle says, was mentioned in Lady Dilke's book, and is the one formerly at Bagatelle. Mr. Jacques Seligmann, as everyone knows, bought the Paris portion of the former collection of Sir Richard Wallace, later Mr. Murray Scott's, from Lady Sackville West, which portion, including "La Frileuse," had been removed from Bagatelle to the Wallace mansion in the Rue Lafitte, Paris.

As to the quoted sale price of the bronze of "La Frileuse," we cannot discuss this, as it is a matter between buyer and seller, but we believe that the bronze of "La Frileuse," only once reproduced, has naturally a far greater value than the "Diana" of the Yerkes collection, which, to our knowledge, has been reproduced three times in bronze.—Ed.]

Criticism of Loan Art Works.

Editor, AMERICAN ART NEWS,

Dear Sir: "A Visitor's" letter of protest against what he calls "damaging" criticism by reviews of loan exhibitions demands a counter protest, for the point involved is important.

The question resolves itself into just this: Shall a critic treat a work of art honestly or dishonestly? To treat it at all is equivalent to claiming to treat it honestly. Certainly if he so writes as to create, whether by means positively or negatively, an impression different from that which the picture made upon him, he is insincere; in short, he lies.

Art criticism of the sort your correspondent would seem to demand—denatured stuff, warranted not to "depreciate" anybody's "property"—is not art criticism at all and whoever condescends to write it is not a critic but a mere commercial prostitute.

Again, your correspondent talks about "a court of law" and "damages," in connection with the possible effect of sincere criticism on monetary values. Bosh! Doesn't he know that all works of art are by their very nature a public possession, to be viewed, studied, spoken and written about with absolute freedom by everybody? Doesn't he know that the very money values he is so anxious about are thus established and maintained and that the very way to damage them most would be to show a shyness of sincere criticism?

It would seem as though good art were difficult enough to produce and to understand without adding trouble by mixing up questions of artistic criticism and appreciation with questions of ownerships and pocketbooks. Even good criticism cannot do

very much to make people understand art, but certainly all that it can do must forever centrally depend upon the intelligent sincerity of him who writes it. Far from being overdosed with art writers having the "bad taste" (and personal courage) to write sincerely we are much more in the opposite case.

If there is abroad a man sincere enough to write and a newspaper free enough to print art criticism that is thinking of art and not of "property"—then here's to their health, and long may they wave!

Bolton Brown.

[While we are pleased to publish Mr. Brown's characteristically well expressed letter, as an interesting contribution to the perennial question as to what art criticism should be, and generally is not, it seems to us that he has missed the point of 'A Visitor's' argument against criticism of or attack upon art works loaned to public exhibitions by generous owners and usually from patriotic or charitable motives. Why should an owner of property allow such property to benefit the public through its display, without any possible financial return and have said property impaired in value, as it frequently is, by the criticism of writers often ignorant and incompetent, or sometimes having personal scores to settle with such owners or those who have requested them to loan their works? One should not "look a gift horse in the mouth."—Ed.]

Those Philadelphia Portraits.

Editor AMERICAN ART NEWS

Dear Sir:

In reading the editorials in your paper and your quotations from others in connection with the supposed "Fake" pictures in Independence Hall, Phila., I would like to add a word as in 1875 I served on a committee for restoration of the building having the "expert" advice of the late Daniel Cotier and the late James Renwick, also early in 1876 I was given a commission to copy a portrait of one of the "Signers", Wm. Floyd—the original being at the ancestral Home, at Greenport, L. I.

I can still feel the deathly chill of the parlor there where I had to work from the original, almost at the risk of pneumonia. Several other artists were also given commissions to copy other originals, there being no known copies or portraits of the few that were left. They closed up the list with what they had and so the controversy over the supposed "Fakes" is to me a very mistaken conclusion, and partly one of a new committee which does not seem to have made much of an investigation whether they are originals, copies or so-called "Fakes" and want to throw them all "out." Perhaps to be able to get "new jobs" for some of their artist friends.

While in Paris in 1875 I made an oil study of the Tomb of La Fayette at the Cimetiere Picpus.

I presented it to the City of Phila. to hang in Independence Hall. Two years later, on visiting the city I found the work covered with dust and dirt. They promised to "clean it off." Evidently the "job" was given to some poor char woman who used probably sand soap for in visiting the Hall again later, I found most of the iron railing around the tomb nearly all erased and all of the lettering on the tomb, as well as the Mural Tablets rubbed off entirely. Also the tablet reading "Tomb of La Fayette, Cimetiere Picpus," was all gone and a new tablet in its place reading "Tomb of La Fayette—Pere le Chaise" the latter not being known as a cemetery until many years later, but what a hard lesson to learn to whom to give it to.

Yours very truly

E. L. Henry

N. Y. Mar. 12, 1917.

Mr. W. E. Roberts, the English art cataloger and compiler, has returned to N. Y. from Toledo, Ohio, where he has been cataloging the picture collections of Messrs. Edward D. Libbey and John S. Willys.

Mr. Arthur S. Vernay returned from London on the "Finland" last week and brought with him a number of interesting purchases. Mr. Vernay claims that prices are even higher than ever abroad and it is most difficult to obtain really important pieces of any kind.

Leon Dabo will hold an exhibition of his recent work at the Goupil Galleries beginning April 15. As this will be the first "one man" show held by this artist in several years, it will be of more than usual interest to his followers to note the advance in his work.